

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 14

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
6 August 1985

INTERNATIONAL

Though still Marxist, Mozambique is shifting toward the West

By Sam Levy

Special to The Christian Science Monitor

Maputo, Mozambique

Ngungunyane came home recently and brought with him "a new era" in relations between Lisbon and Maputo, according to Mozambique President Samora Machel.

The return of the remains of the 19th century warrior, whom the Portuguese colonial authorities exiled to the Azores in 1896, is symbolic of the improvement in relations between Mozambique and its former colonizer and hint of the realignment of Mozambique's foreign policy away from the Soviet bloc and toward the West.

In international economic and diplomatic relations, Maputo is becoming more "nonaligned" than "Soviet allied."

There are limits to the distance Maputo can put between itself and Moscow. The war with guerrillas, in which the ruling political party, Frelimo (Front for the Liberation of Mozambique) controls only the cities, leaves the regime dependent on the Soviets for arms. A quick end to the war is unlikely. And within the Frelimo Party itself, the pro-Soviet faction remains strong.

In only three years, however, the gulf between Mozambique and the West, once a yawning chasm, has narrowed considerably. As the United States Ambassador in Maputo, Peter Jon De Vos, remarked, "We've come a long way in a very short time."

The most radical policy stage in Mozambique's 10 years as an independent nation was immediately after independence in 1975. The Frelimo Party had received most of its support from the East bloc during its war against the Portuguese colonial government.

Nurtured in the "socialist liberation" tradition, it tried to put theory into practice in the newly proclaimed Marxist-Leninist state. Nationalization and collectivization were the order of the day.

But nationalization scared away the majority of the Portuguese residents, who made up the skilled labor force, and radical political and economic policies provoked armed dissidence and guerrilla activity.

And just as the guerrilla war began to heat up, the economy cooled down. In 1981, Mozambique's per capita gross national product began its headlong plunge, falling 15 percent. Drought and war made things worse.

It was then that the shortcomings of an alliance with the East bloc began to show. The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance — the East bloc's equivalent of the Common Market — refused Mozambique's membership application that April. The Bulgarian agronomists sent to breed miracle rice had, it developed, overdosed the paddies with chemical fertilizer.

Moscow could spare little food for drought relief. The army the Russians had trained in conventional warfare was ill-prepared to fight a guerrilla counter-insurgency.

In 1981, the Portuguese government dropped compensation claims against Mozambique resulting from nationalization, and the rapprochement between former colony and colonizer began. Portugal agreed to supply arms and training in counterinsurgency.

Portuguese companies began receiving more technical assistance contracts. When Portuguese President Ramalho Eanes visited Maputo this April he was given a genuinely warm welcome.

The Nkomati Accord was signed by Mozambique and South Africa in March 1984, pledging the two sides to stop supporting each other's internal opposition movements.

It has altered the dynamics of the signatories' bilateral relations. Some elements of the South African government and business communities, formerly President Machel's active foes, now feel that their best chance for investment and

Continued

2

marketing opportunities in Mozambique lies with the present regime. Farmers in South Africa's Transvaal province would like to lease Mozambican farmland, and industrialists to export cheaply through the port of Maputo.

The liberal foreign investment code, published last September, confirmed many businesses in their disposition to bank on Machel. South African firms have to date cooperated on a significant scale in refrigeration, mail delivery, and railway maintenance. And the recent Cabora Bassa agreement between Mozambique, South Africa, and Portugal, governing uses of the enormous hydroelectric dam of that name in Tete Province, indicates deepening economic links.

Despite the fact that it has not brought an end to the war, Nkomati brought other dividends. Relations with the United States, which had encouraged the accord, improved markedly thereafter. Despite the expulsion of four US diplomats in 1981, allegedly for spying, it was the US, along with the Western allies, that answered the call for emergency drought relief. US food aid shot from 43,000 tons in 1982 to an approval in fiscal 1984 for

350,000 tons. In 1984 Mozambique was the largest recipient of US emergency food aid in the world.

More controversial than food or agricultural-development assistance is a proposal to send "nonlethal" military aid to Mozambique. Critics point out that the regime remains avowedly Marxist-Leninist, and that hundreds of Soviet and allied advisers continue in the country.

The Foreign Aid bill passed by the US Congress bars arms aid to Mozambique unless a variety of conditions are met, including human rights progress, a reduction in the number of foreign military personnel in the country, and steps toward holding free elections by Sept. 30, 1986.

Ambassador De Vos says that although the Machel regime is not perfect, "constructive engagement is not just for South Africa. It's for the region as a whole."

The country joined the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (which has already made over a \$45 million loan) in 1984, and signed the Lomé Convention late last year, tying it in to the Economic Community-third world economic-aid system.